

VZCZCXYZ0023  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNO #0002/01 0031531  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 031531Z JAN 08  
FM USMISSION USNATO  
TO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0433  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0791  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1529  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L USNATO 000002

SIPDIS

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/20/2008  
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [PREL](#)  
SUBJECT: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TOUR OF AFGHAN REGIONAL LEADERS  
TO NATO, BERLIN

Classified By: DCM Richard Olson for reasons 1.4 B & D

11. (U) SUMMARY: For the first time, USNATO sponsored a NATO tour for Afghan provincial officials to Brussels and Berlin December 11-14. This joint effort with Embassy Kabul brought influential decision makers and leaders of society from vital Afghan provinces to the centers of decision making and public opinion on the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) missions in Afghanistan. The group,s interaction with both officials and the media generated great interest and lengthy discussions, as well as ideas for more effective outreach to European audiences through Afghan voices. USNATO plans to expand this program and to bring other Afghan leaders to key European capitals, both through visits and through virtual remote links as resources allow.  
END SUMMARY

12. (U) USNATO recently sponsored a tour for influential decision makers and leaders of society from vital Afghan provinces to Brussels and Berlin to introduce them to these centers of decision and public opinion on the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. This first such USNATO-sponsored tour bringing Afghan officials to Europe proved so successful that future tours are already being planned. Participants included: Asadullah Khalid, Governor of Kandahar Province (former Governor of Ghazni)  
Nazir Ahmad, Aide to Governor Khalid (and President Karzai,s son-in-law)  
Malawi Ruhanni, Head of Ulema Shura, President of Religious Scholars, Farah Province  
Hangama Sadeet, Farah Provincial Council Speaker  
Muhammad Omari, Head of Radio and TV Department, Farah Province  
Mohammad Naim, Deputy Director for Labor and Social Affairs, Badghis Province

13. (U) In Brussels, the program included meetings with U.S. Ambassador to NATO Nuland, Chairman of NATO,s Military Committee General Henault, and NATO Deputy Secretary General Bisogniero. The group also met with representatives from our Allies and the NATO International Staff to discuss strategic communications, and with Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) Craddock,s Chief of Staff General Lather,( Germany ). In addition, Ambassador Nuland hosted an event with NATO Permanent Representatives from France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, and The Netherlands, as well as representatives from Spain and the UK. The Berlin portion of the trip has been reported separately from Berlin, and proved to be valuable in

exposing Afghans to the politics in an important Allied nation. Programs in both cities ended with media opportunities in which the Afghan officials, particularly Governor Khalid, spoke about the success of ISAF operations and what more the international community could do to advance security in the region.

MESSAGE: SECURITY, SECURITY, SECURITY (

¶4. (C/NF) Governor Khalid, the de facto voice of the delegation, is a well-connected mover and shaker in Afghanistan, and is very savvy in both formal meetings and with the media. He understands differing audiences and how to subtly adapt his message, which was mainly about security both in Kandahar and generally in Afghanistan. He described the relationship between security and reconstruction as one of &chicken and egg,<sup>8</sup> and expressed his firm belief that without a lasting, stable and secure environment, implementing development and reconstruction projects simply wastes time and energy. In private with the U.S., he was quite critical of the performance of some ISAF contributor nations, especially in RC-W, and stated that Italy had paid local Taliban commanders to avoid hostilities. In the larger groups, including with Ambassadors, Governor Khalid was greatly appreciative of ISAF, and particularly of the work of Canadians in Kandahar. Ulema Shura head Ruhanni applauded the contributions of ISAF, noting that &compared to five years ago, we have everything.<sup>8</sup> He also stressed that if NATO and the international community stay firm, &we will win.<sup>8</sup> In response to a question from the Canadian PermRep about when the Afghan National Security Forces would be able to do most of the fighting, Governor Khalid noted that the Afghan Army is able to do some alone or in the lead (as demonstrated in Ghazni and in Musa Qala), but they are not

adequately equipped, lacking helicopters and heavy weaponry in particular. He asked Allies to be patient and to exert more pressure both in the fighting and in the training.

¶5. (C/NF) Ms. Sadeet of the Farah Provincial Council agreed that in Farah, as well, the major problem is security, but that from the perspective of her constituents, the situation is getting considerably worse as the Taliban increasingly draw on support coming from Pakistan. Although she expressed appreciation for ISAF, she noted that both civilian casualties and security searches of houses caused great upset in her community. She appreciated Ambassador Nuland's comment that ISAF has taken these concerns into account, including deciding that only Afghan forces would be authorized to do searches, but noted that any forced entry of homes is still perceived as a personal and cultural violation.

¶5. (C/NF) On the subject of reconciliation, Governor Khalid stated that only ten percent of the Taliban were hardline extremists, which controlled the remainder through fear. Without this fear, he expressed belief that the majority of Taliban could be dealt with. When the topic of negotiating with the Taliban arose, the group agreed that further efforts to engage moderate elements were required. The Governor admitted to contacts with certain elements, but said that the hardliners &need to be killed,<sup>8</sup> a view that others in the group also endorsed.

¶6. (C/NF) In responding to a question from the German PermRep on counternarcotics, Governor Khalid described how the Afghan people were the losers in poppy cultivation with the Taliban manipulated markets and controlled cultivation. Poor farmers were the losers, not the winners, he stated. He stressed that it was essential to influence the farmers with alternative livelihood projects during the planting season. He noted that Kandahar is leading in overall eradication efforts even using just local police, and that he was even more optimistic about the prospects for next year.

THEN DEVELOPMENT

¶7. (U) Governor Khalid acknowledged the challenge of bringing economic development and investment to insecure areas, but

expressed appreciation for several USAID programs that are easing access to markets for agricultural products such as pomegranates, and noted that he is working to attract investment to his province. Underlining the importance of economic development and its relationship to security, Governor Khalid mentioned that although Kandahar is famous for its pomegranates, investors shy away because of the security situation, and Kandahar residents, including the Governor himself, can only buy juice produced in Iran. Ms. Sadeet, while citing some progress for women, was very anxious to see more reconstruction in Farah province, leading to greater employment. Her chief criticism was directed at the weakness of the central government and at the widespread corruption that she stated exists at all levels. Governor Khalid also cited a lack of coordination among international institutions and Afghan officials (and within the various levels of the Afghan government for that matter) as an obstacle to greater progress. He cited specific examples such as dam projects that greatly benefited one or two communities while depriving others villages of water, and of small enterprise development projects being developed in one location and the necessary road infrastructure in another. Better consultations with provincial officials, he argued, would eliminate some of these &simple mistakes& and &ten elders are sometimes better than 100 soldiers& when it comes to these decisions.

#### STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS REQUIRES A NON-TRADITIONAL APPROACH

¶8. (C/NF) Governor Khalid cited significant weaknesses in the Afghan government with respect to media. Using the example of civilian casualties, he recalled a phone call from President Karzai inquiring about one operation that occurred in his province and noted that he was only able to get information after several days, during which time the journalists had access only to Taliban sources and false allegations. Given only two likely sources of information ) the government and the Taliban ) he proposed that each of the 34 provinces designate one spokesman with consistent

access to the central government, ISAF and international institutions, who could respond immediately at the provincial level. Noting that most Afghan leaders do not know how to talk to their publics, he underscored that training some of these leaders would enable them to more effectively counter Taliban misinformation.

¶9. (C/NF) Ms. Sadeet underscored the importance of ulemas in spreading good news stories at the local level, and Mr. Ruhanni offered interesting insight into the role that he and his fellow scholars and mullahs play in the region, particularly in bolstering public opinion against the Taliban. He described two categories of media outlets, traditional (primarily radio with BBC and VOA being the most important) and cultural (mosques, shuras, ulemas). He noted that while the Taliban have a radio station in each town, there is also a mosque and that ulemas will continue to play a focal role in communications, even as they have lost many members due to targeting by hard-core Taliban elements.

¶10. (C/NF) Governor Khalid understands the public opinion battle over support to ISAF, particularly in Allied countries sending troops to Afghanistan, and the need to address European audiences with sophisticated messages and on-the-ground realities. He relayed that his interaction with media in Berlin and Brussels had opened his eyes to the extent of ignorance in media both about what is truly happening in Afghanistan, as well as why most of the countries are there. He emphasized the importance of explaining to international audiences the dangers of terrorism to persuade them of the need for a long-term commitment to the stability of his country. He expressed frustration with the embedding of western journalists within ISAF units as he stated they tend to report only the &bad news& and focus on the fighting. He urged the U.S. and others to send journalists to the provinces, and specifically offered to host media groups in Kandahar. He also expressed his willingness to do interviews remotely with international

media and to work with USNATO in that regard.

#### EUROPEAN MEDIA: STRONG DEMAND FOR AFGHAN VOICES

¶11. (U) The German media in Berlin and the international media in Brussels were very interested in the opportunity to hear about the group's experiences and opinions of the international effort to bring stability to Afghanistan. Governor Khalid, a young, engaging leader fluent in English, and Hangama Sadeet, a strong Afghan woman, were particularly adept at conveying their messages to the media. Embassy Berlin held a very well attended press conference for the two, resulting in coverage in AP and Der Spiegel. Despite interference from the EU Summit December 14, media in Brussels were very interested in speaking to Governor Khalid, who participated in a roundtable for Spanish, French and Japanese press and gave interviews to BBC World Asia TV and BBC Radio's Pashto World Service. In the media events, the Governor and Ms. Sadeet honestly assessed the security situation and the challenges faced by their own security forces as well as the international community, and while praising the international efforts, made a plea for more resources across the board. Their words were compelling and convincing, and dispelled some of the media's natural suspicion of the U.S. backing for the trip so that their messages were fresh and were heard.

#### CONCLUSION: WE NEED TO DO MORE

¶12. (U) This program made it very apparent that the Afghan people themselves are the best advocates for renewed commitment to peace and security in the area, and should be given more and greater platforms to speak. By putting an Afghan face on these increasingly important issues, this group raised the profile of the mission in Afghanistan with decision makers and, through the media, the general public in Berlin and Brussels, and publics in Europe. Because of the success of this program, achieved through good cooperation between USNATO and Embassies in Kabul and Berlin, USNATO is planning three more FY-08 tours of Afghan policy makers to Brussels and European capitals to influence policy makers and publics, and to highlight the importance of the mission in Afghanistan and our commitment to its people. We will also work with Embassy Kabul, NATO HQ, ISAF and others on

tailoring visits to Afghanistan by European media to better demonstrate progress and to amplify compelling Afghan voices.  
OLSON